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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the World Young Women's Christian Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) joins the United Nations, the Commission on the Status of Women and organizations around the world in commemorating 15 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. Women from the YWCA movement have long been involved in contributing to the women's movement and to United Nations efforts to promote women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. The 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action have informed the work of YWCA member associations providing services in over 20,000 communities around the world, while advocating with Governments and other stakeholders for accountability in protecting and promoting women's and girls' rights and dignity.

2. Great advances in respect of women have been made since 1995, especially in the areas of decision-making, laws, policies and education. According to *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009*,[1] more women are running for public office and have access to health services, including prenatal care. More countries have revised their laws to ensure justice for women who face violence, including intimate partner abuse. The report also shows that more girls are attending school and staying in school longer.

3. Despite these advances, the situation for women, young women and girls in many communities is still deplorable. Although more women are elected to public office, women hold just 18.2 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats. In developing countries, half a million women die every year from complications during or after childbirth. The enrolment of girls in primary school in both developing and developed countries may be at the highest rate ever, but many girls face sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination while at school. The burden of domestic tasks also affects the quality of education that girls receive.

An intersectional approach to women's human rights

4. The global development and peace agenda stated in the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved until women are economically, socially and politically empowered, their rights are protected and they enjoy equal status with men. The last 15 years have shown the importance as well as the inadequacies of gender mainstreaming as an approach. The next 15 years demand new approaches that build on existing progress while accelerating the transformative actions for the empowerment of women and gender equality. The intersections of the 12 areas of the Beijing Platform for Action must be addressed and future solutions must be derived from a multisectoral approach.

5. Adopting a strong human rights-based approach ensures that gender equality is at the centre of the Millennium Development Goals. Many international instruments provide Member States with clear direction on how to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Declaration of Commitment

[1] United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women? Gender & Accountability* (New York, 2008).

of the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals. These documents provide further guidance on the factors and solutions that can ensure women live full lives and enjoy human rights.

6. Identifying linkages between the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and other instruments is crucial. As the Millennium Development Goals have met with great political will and enjoy a high profile, the United Nations, Member States and civil society must make an extra effort to draw parallels from the Beijing Platform for Action to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals are fulfilled with a holistic approach that addresses all factors that can improve the status of women, young women and girls, thus promoting development and reducing poverty.

Women and health

7. A recent World Health Organization report shows that the leading cause globally of death among women of reproductive age is HIV/AIDS.[2] The report also indicates that pregnancy and childbearing present major risk factors for women and girls. Promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls, including the right to safe motherhood, is therefore essential; a human rights approach must be adopted in addressing reproductive health.

8. Women make up about 50 per cent of all people living with HIV, and the proportion of women infected with HIV is increasing in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.[3] In sub-Saharan Africa, the region most affected by AIDS, 60 per cent of all adults and three out of four young people living with the virus are female.[4] These figures demonstrate the great threat to their personal health that women and girls face.

9. The intersection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and violence against women is a growing concern. Socio-economic factors and legal challenges that put many HIV-positive women at risk of violence must be addressed. Many HIV-positive women are beaten, thrown out of their homes and lose their possessions when they share their HIV status with their families. Governments, international organizations and civil society must ensure that laws and policies addressing inequality and poverty are implemented in order to protect women from violence.

10. Health-care services must address the global health inequities that women, young women and girls face, while recognizing the intersection of services to ensure that women receive appropriate health care in a manner where they are respected and not judged.

Violence against women

11. The safety and security of women is crucial to development. We welcome increased focus on eliminating violence against women, including the Secretary-

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[2] World Health Organization, *Women and Health: Today's Evidence Tomorrow's Agenda* (Geneva, 2009).

[3] Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: Executive Summary* (Geneva, 2008).

[4] Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organization, *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update* (Geneva, 2007).

General's campaign. Several recent United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009), show commitments to end women's vulnerability, especially in conflict areas. These resolutions must be implemented.

12. Women face the risk of violence at every stage of their life cycle. Up to 70 per cent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime — the majority from husbands, intimate partners or someone they know.[5] Among women aged 15 to 44, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.[6]

13. In 2002 alone, an estimated 150 million girls under 18 suffered some form of sexual violence.[6] A recent World Health Organization study found that many women said their first sexual experience was not consensual. Creative solutions are needed to reach, protect and empower girls and young women.

14. The World YWCA welcomes the steps that Governments are taking worldwide to reform their legal systems in order to tackle violence against women, as advocated by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A 2003 study by the United Nations Development Fund for Women shows that rape and sexual assault are widely recognized as crimes, but that progress is needed in instituting legislation on marital rape and sexual harassment. Over 120 countries worldwide have legislation on sexual assault, but only 43 have legislation on marital rape.

15. Enforcement of law must be ensured and Member States must expand gender-responsive justice systems to facilitate women's access to legal systems. Governments, international organizations and civil society must ensure that laws and policies that uphold women's human rights are enforced in order to protect women from violence.

Women in power and decision-making

16. Fifteen years after Beijing, many more women are in politics and positions of power. The representation of women in national assemblies has accelerated from 11.6 per cent in 1995 to 18.4 per cent in 2008.[1] From 1975 to 1995 the rate of increase was less than 1 per cent. But we still lag behind set goals. To ensure goals are met, Governments must engage women at all levels of society.

17. It is important to address women's access to political power, but women's leadership at the community level is also crucial to achieving development goals and ending poverty. Governments must include women more and partner with non-governmental organizations to achieve these goals.

18. Young women are especially important for leadership. Youth engagement leads to youth development and youth development contributes to the health of vibrant and inclusive communities.

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[5] World Health Organization, *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (Geneva, 2005).

[6] United Nations Development Fund for Women, "Violence against women worldwide", fact sheet.

Recommendations

19. The World YWCA calls on the Commission on the Status of Women to:

(a) Invest in women and girls: adequate and accessible funding must be provided for services that provide holistic solutions to the factors that prevent gender equality and women's empowerment;

(b) Ensure the safety and security of women and girls: create safe spaces, to ensure the physical, sexual and psychological safety of women and girls in all aspects of their lives;

(c) Involve women: all women, including women working at the community level, young women and women living with HIV must be meaningfully involved in relevant decision-making, respecting their right to self-determination and enabling their participation in developing strategies to the challenges they face;

(d) Expand access to comprehensive services: through a life cycle and multisectoral approach, ensure women and girls have access to the information and services they need to live healthy lives;

(e) Promote women's leadership: encourage the participation of women at all levels of society, including through the equitable representation of women at the highest levels of national political, executive, legislative and judicial structures;

(f) Keep promises made: commitments made to fight HIV/AIDS, promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and combat violence against women must be respected, and laws that promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women enforced, as advocated by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.